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FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

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SUBJECT: UNESCO: SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES SECTOR
SEEKS TO CHART COURSE IN ADVANCE OF OVERALL REVIEW

REFTELS A. 05 PARIS 5862 B. 05 PARIS 7446

1. SUMMARY AND COMMENT: On January 11, Dr. Marc Renaud, former president of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, outlined for selected delegations his recommendations regarding the future role of UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences Sector: to act as an "observatory"; to be a key bridge to policy-making; to be a "capacity builder" by helping governments develop appropriate science policies. The Social and Human Sciences Sector (SHS) hired Renaud to study the sector and submit recommendations on ways to renew and strengthen its programs. Participants invited to attend the meeting, which was organized by the Canadian delegation, included some Geneva Group members and Brazil; during the discussion period, many expressed skepticism about the division's programs and activities. The day before, Renaud participated in a panel discussion on the Sector's MOST (Management of Social Transformations) program, presided by SHS Sector ADG Pierre Sane. This was an opportunity for certain delegations - South Africa, Senegal, and Argentina -- to express support for the SHS Sector, and for its leader, in advance of an overall review of the SHS and Natural Sciences sectors that may lead to a merger. These meetings highlight the extent to which the impending overall review (REFS A AND B) has added urgency to the SHS Sector's efforts to retool its programs.

2. U.S. Mission TO UNESCO believes that some of the functions and initiatives outlined by Renaud are not appropriate for the SHS sector. We will meet with Renaud to express our concerns at the proposed expansion of the sector's role in advance of the overall review of the two Science programs. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

3. Renaud began his presentation by stressing that although he had been hired to evaluate the SHS Sector before the General Conference decision to launch an overall review of the SHS Sector and the Natural Sciences Sector, he hoped that his work could inform that review. During his presentation, "UNESCO and the Social Sciences: A Unique 'Brokering' Role", Renaud asserted that "UNESCO should not be a grant agency" or a research center. Rather, the SHS sector can play a unique role in the UN system by acting as a world "observatory" (on issues including migration, ethics, cultural diversity, etc); as a bridge between policymakers and researchers (by organizing conferences and developing tools); and as a capacity builder by assisting in the development of sound science policies.

4. Renaud explained that the Social and Human Sciences sector is currently promoting two initiatives. The first initiative is a long-term project under the auspices of the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Program. This project includes the launch of a "Google-type" search engine for policy-makers. Through this search engine, policymakers will have free access to relevant social science research results that can assist them in decision making. Success will be contingent on whether member states subscribe to the idea of the database and actually submit research material. The second initiative is a conference to be held in Buenos Aires in February 2006 that more than 1,000 participants, including from UN agencies, have been invited to attend. The objectives that organizers hope to achieve include: securing member state support for the search engine developed by the MOST program; gaining agreement with other UN agencies on a division of roles in the social sciences; strengthening networks among researchers on the global (vice regional) level; and enhancing dialogue between researchers and policymakers, particularly in the context of a forum devoted to regional integration organizations.

15. Renaud suggested that a possible step towards greater diffusion of information from the SHS programs would be to limit the number of single report brochures and books that are published in favor of a "yearbook", a single publication including all related studies.

16. Renaud concluded by seeking feedback from member states. The German representative asked Renaud which issues and themes - rather than functions -- should be the priorities of the SHS sector. Currently, some programs, such as the study of migration, remain extant for much longer than is necessary. Discussion of this topic concluded with the agreement by participants that there is a scattering of priorities in the SHS sector and that a system of prioritization needs to be put into place. US Mission DCM stressed that the function of a research institution was not an appropriate one for the SHS Sector; he cited as an example a study on migration that UNESCO published advocating the abolition of all restrictions on migration, a position contrary to policies enforced by the U.S. and many member states. Other representatives echoed the U.S. concern.

17. Some participants voiced concerns over certain of Dr. Renaud's recommendations. The Swedish delegation raised the issue of cooperation between the sectors in UNESCO on future programs. He stated that many programs are relevant to more than one sector, but currently, the structure of the organization does not encourage cross-sector work: UNESCO should think more in terms of programs rather than sectors. Many delegations agreed; this was noted as a possible topic to be explored in the overall review of the SHS and Natural Sciences sectors, and an objective for the new medium-term strategy (2008-13).

18. The day before, Renaud participated in a panel discussion on the Sector's MOST program, presided by SHS Sector ADG Pierre Sane. The South African Ambassador also participated in the panel: The South African Minister for Social Development currently chairs the MOST intergovernmental council, and South Africa plays an active role in the program. This was an opportunity for other delegations -- Senegal and Argentina -- to express support for the MOST program, including advocating increased funding. Oliver